

# My Doctor Said What!?:

## Identifying and assessing online health information resources

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### Background

- In 2013, 72% of Americans used the Internet to find answers to questions about a variety of health topics.
- The quality of online health information varies greatly, and the information can even be harmful.
- Health information consumers may not have the skills needed to evaluate the quality of the information they find.
- Minnesotans have a higher than average health literacy, but there is a gap in research about their online health seeking behaviors.

### Aims

1. Identify online sources Minnesotans use to answer health questions.
2. Learn how Minnesotans use the health information that they find.
3. Assess Minnesotans’ confidence in their ability to evaluate the quality of the health information.
4. Identify what Minnesotans feel is missing from online health information sources.

### Methods

#### MIXED METHODS CROSS SECTIONAL

- 2016 Minnesota State Fair
- University of Minnesota Research Building
- Convenience sample yielded 284 participants

#### SURVEY

- Delivered via REDCap on an iPad
- 6-8 minutes to complete
- 43 questions:
  - Online sources of health information
  - Use of information
  - Information quality assessment
  - Knowledge and confidence
  - Missing from current landscape
  - Demographic data

#### DATA ANALYSIS

- Thematic analyses were conducted in Nvivo 11
- Quantitative analyses were conducted in R Studio

### Results

TABLE 1: ONLINE SOURCES OF HEALTH INFORMATION

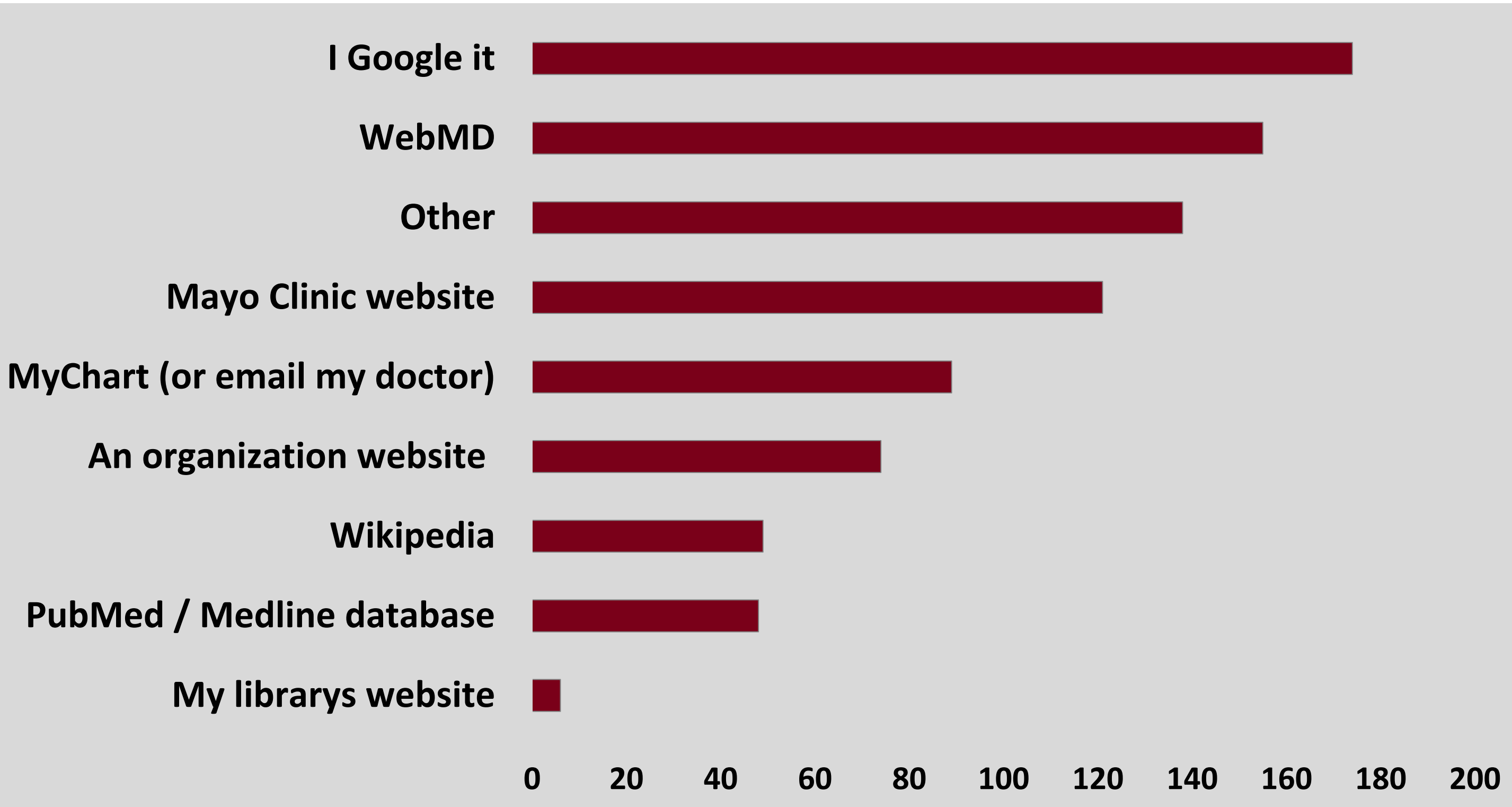
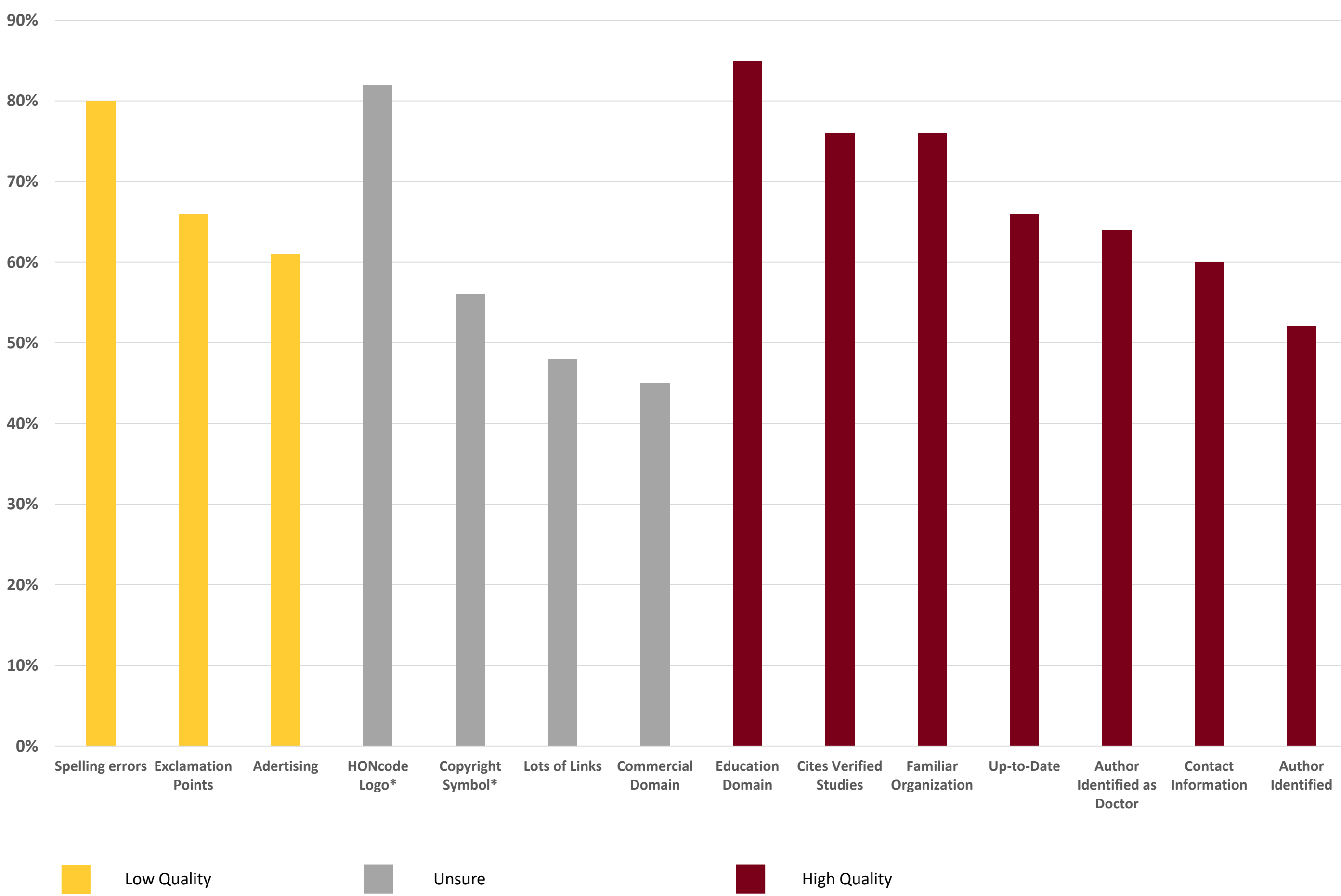


TABLE 2: ACCESS TO HEALTH INFORMATION ONLINE

Increased their perceived knowledge of:	
Nature and cause of a health condition	88%
Medical treatment options	88%
Preventing further issues with a health condition	75%
Increased their perceived confidence around:	
Speaking with a provider about concerns	87%
When to seek professional medical care	83%
Maintaining lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise	64%
Making smart decisions as a caregiver	63%

FIGURE 1: PERCEIVED INDICATORS OF WEBSITE QUALITY



\* These are proven indicators of quality websites

### Results

- **80%** of respondents said they “sometimes” find the health information they are looking for on the Internet.
- Participants who correctly identified quality indicators (HONcode or copyright) were significantly more likely to report they “always” found the health information they were looking for than those who did not (p=0.01).
- Participants used the health information they found to discuss it with a health professional (**78%**), share it with a friend or family member (**76%**), and decide when to see a health professional (**74%**).
- Health providers were significantly more confident, than non-health providers, that they had the skills needed to evaluate online health information resources (p=0.05).
- **58%** of individuals who thought the presence of advertisements were a sign of low quality reported using WebMD, a website containing advertisements.
- **1/3** of participants wanted evidence-based online health information (i.e., underlying research, subject experts, data, and supporting publications).
- Participants expressed distrust of websites that catastrophize, charge money, display advertisements, and provide conflicting information.

### Conclusion

- Minnesotans placed a high value on the ability to access health information online and used it for a variety of purposes.
- A high percentage of participants perceived that they had the knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate online health information (Table 2), yet a high percentage were also unsure about proven quality indicators (Figure 1). Future research could focus on the potential harmful effects of this gap.
- 19% of our participants were healthcare providers, likely skewing our results – we would expect that a different sample would have less knowledge, confidence, and navigational skills than this population.

